



**Comments from the Head Master on Recent Issues in News:
Comments in School Meeting from Head Master Steve Murray H'55 '65 '16
P'16**

Good morning. I'd like to share some thoughts with you on a few issues that I feel deserve discussion, in part because they affect members of our community, and in part because the respectful sharing of ideas is what we do in our school and in a free and open society. I also feel it is important that you hear directly from me.

There have been a number of messages coming from the leadership of our country recently that have caused consternation, bred confusion, and made some members of our community feel unsettled, caused them to wonder if they belonged here. I am not here to make a political statement about those messages, which appear to be evolving in any case, but they do deserve comment.

A number of the positions taken by the current administration have caused debate right here on campus – very thoughtful and informed debate on both sides. There have been calls recently, for example, to declare our campus a 'Sanctuary Campus' in order to make a more explicit statement about our willingness to support and protect those of us who may feel vulnerable.

These campus conversations have been good for us, we are a school after all, and they have caused me to pause and reflect upon what I believe schools should do when faced with this type of uncertainty. I expressed to a number of students who gathered last week to debate the issue that I have been and will always be committed to helping our students in vulnerable circumstances of any sort – and that it is not clear to me what a "sanctuary declaration" would accomplish. Still, I am awaiting a final recommendation from those sponsoring the petition, and as I say, we have been engaging in thoughtful conversation along the way.

In addition, due to recent executive orders, there have also been questions about the status of visas for international students, concerns about leaving and entering this country, and concerns for incoming international students.

There was heightened confusion because there was so little time for various agencies to conduct their usual legal and administrative review of an executive order, which in this case specifically bans entry from certain countries for a period of time and which calls for a moratorium on all refugee admissions for four months. Because of the timing and the hasty rollout of this directive, many travelers were affected and there remains a degree of uncertainty for anyone carrying a visa seeking to enter this country.

Debra Wilson, General Counsel for NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools), has issued some preliminary, cautionary advice for visa and green card holders from the named countries in the executive order, and the Boston law firm, Schwartz Hannum, a firm that does a great deal of work with independent schools including Lawrenceville, issued the following message:

“We urge independent schools, colleges and universities to be extremely cautious when determining which students leave the United States for any reason, and particularly with respect to school-sponsored trips out of the country. We have already received several inquiries from educational institutions that have students and employees who are outside of the U.S. and being prohibited from returning.”

We are watching this situation closely and will monitor it, and we will do all that we can to understand the situation and to advise any members of our community who may be affected in any way.

Now, on a more personal level, my goal here to reassure those of you who may feel unsettled, and to remind all of us that this campus is fundamentally a place where all should feel welcome, safe, secure, and respected. Let me offer a few thoughts on why we are so committed to this as an institution, and while I may not have answers for all questions being raised, I hope I can at least clarify a few positions.

We are a distinctly American school enriched and made whole by our international students. Students from abroad have been part of our school from our very earliest decades of existence. We draw students from all across the United States and from around the world, and this coming together of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and religions is a vital element of the educational experience. Drew Faust said to the Harvard community, “We are all Harvard.” Well, “We are all Lawrenceville.” Every single one of us.

And yet, as I say, we are a distinctly American school, and with that come certain values that are embedded in our DNA, values that are core to Lawrenceville as an academic institution. These values are not at all limited to Americans, and some are rather universal, but in many respects these values are fundamental to this nation and some are explicitly enshrined in the Constitution.

So what are some of those values?

- **Freedom and respect for all religions.** It is in the First Amendment. One of the great strengths of this school is our religious diversity and the opportunity to learn from those who practice a different faith. In recent times, members of the Islamic faith have felt questioned in this country merely because of their religion. I am proud to say that this is simply not part of who we are. We are all Lawrenceville.

- **We value our place in a global context** – we value mutual trust and understanding among countries and cultures around the world. And as I said a moment ago, we are enriched by our international connections, our opportunities to bring the world to Lawrenceville, and our opportunities to get out and experience the world.
- **In addition, we value individuality**; we practice every day the ideal of respect for every individual, the right to be heard around the Harkness table, the right to disagree and hold other beliefs.
- **We value privacy**; again, a right upheld in the Constitution;
- **And we value independence**. We are an independent school. We guard and protect the autonomy of our teachers, the independent and innovative nature of our curriculum, and our right to set our own standards of conduct and citizenship on our own campus. And this includes freedom from what some describe as intrusive government overreach into the private affairs of institutions such as ours. I would not easily or willingly allow an outside agency to have access to private information regarding our families, for example, not without strong legal resistance. And this idea of privacy, of independence, and of basic protection from unreasonable and invasive over-reach is, I believe, a distinctly bipartisan value, a shared value, an American value. **And we hold to it here at Lawrenceville.**

So my words this morning are intended to clarify, to reassure, and to communicate both my own feelings and what I feel are core values of this institution. I have a strong feeling that this is just the start of some very significant and compelling discussions and debates yet to come, and I welcome them. They are important, and I call upon all of you to listen and reflect with open minds.

We have lived through uncertain times before, some of them quite divisive, that is the nature of democracy and a free and open society. The strength of our system, our core belief in democracy and the rule of law have always prevailed, and I truly believe will continue to prevail.

Thank you.

Lastly – A number of the deans and I will be available tonight in McClellan Room 5:30-6:30 – stop by if anyone has questions about travel, about visas, or any related complication that may be of concern to you.

Thank you for your attention this morning.